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RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN IMMEDIATE 0001
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0012
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI IMMEDIATE 0001
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE 0011
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE 0001
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE 0004
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 0003
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 0028
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [VE](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA DEMARCHE DELIVERED: HOLY SEE SHARES USG CONCERNS

REF: A. (A) STATE 157206

[1](#)B. (B) CARACAS 591

CLASSIFIED BY: Chris Sandrolini, DCM.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Holy See shares USG concerns about the proposed constitutional reforms in Venezuela and supports statements made by the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference and by the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). As CELAM speaks for all of Latin America bishops' conferences, the Holy See does not expect national episcopal conferences to issue separate statements. The Holy See is pessimistic about the outcome of the December 2 referendum. While the Vatican wishes to have good relations with the Government of Venezuela, tensions remain. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Embassy poloff delivered on November 16 the demarche on Venezuelan democracy (reftel a) to Monsignor Angelo Accattino, the Holy See's Secretariat of State Andean affairs director. Accattino (protect) agreed with our talking points, but was pessimistic about a "no" victory in the December 2 referendum. While the Church commands moral authority and influence over Venezuelan Catholics, Accattino said, the Government of Venezuela (GOV) has managed to convince the poor that whatever Chavez proposes is in their best interest, notwithstanding economic indicators that are starting to show otherwise. Attempts to raise awareness about the truth have to first overcome this presumption. At the same time, Accattino added, it is not the role of the bishops in Venezuela to constitute themselves as a political bloc. He expressed his hope that the opposition would become better organized to fulfill its political role and stand up to the government as needed.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Accattino, the Holy See wishes to have good relations with the GOV for ecclesiastical reasons (i.e., the everyday operation of the Church in the country). During the last Nuncio's term these relations reached a nadir. With the new Nuncio the relationship has slightly improved, but tensions remain. Accattino noted that the GOV is still not allowing a student leader who was granted sanctuary at the Nunciature last March (reftel b) to leave the country, despite repeated Holy See appeals. The Vatican is also troubled by the virulent GOV response to the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference denunciation of the proposed reforms. Accattino welcomed CELAM's letter of solidarity with the bishops of Venezuela. Because CELAM brings together all of the Latin American episcopal conferences, he did not expect individual Latin American conferences to issue separate statements of solidarity. Accattino noted that CELAM and episcopal conferences worldwide issue statements without the

Holy See's involvement (Note: Accattino was not aware of the reported recent visit of Venezuelan bishops to Rome. End note.)

¶4. (C) Comment: In terms of Church-State relations, the Holy See now considers Venezuela the most problematic country in the region. While sympathetic to our efforts to preserve democracy in the Bolivarian Republic, the Holy See is unlikely to take an active role in encouraging national episcopal conferences or Catholic organizations to speak up about Venezuela. It will, however, defend the right of the Church to express --often through the authoritative voice of bishops-- its moral views on important social and political issues in any given country, particularly in those with large number of Catholics. End comment.

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